

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 AID-05 SSO-00
NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 /090 W
-----101334Z 114307 /44

O P 101200Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7474
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USMISSION USUN
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 1086

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

ABIDJAN FOR AMBASSADOR HANDYSIDE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MO, AG
SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: MAURITANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON
ATTACK
AT ZOUERATE

SUMMARY: ON MAY 9 MAURITANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS BRIEFED
CHARGE ON RECENT ATTACK AT ZOUERATE AND EMPHASIZED THAT MAURITANIAN
GOVERNMENT POSITION IS THAT ATTACK WAS AN ACT OF AGGRESSION BY
MERCENARY FORCES LED BY ALGERIAN ARMY OFFICERS. HE CONCLUDED BY
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NOTING "WHAT COUNTRY CAN SAY THAT THIS (ATTACK) IS NOT AGRESSION".
END SUMMARY.

1. MAURITANIAN MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAMDI OULD
MOUKNASS CONVOKED CHARGE DURING LATE AFTERNOON OF MAY 9 TO GIVE
BRIEFING ON MAY 1 ATTACK ON ZOUERA . FOREIONLFENC WDER PGBK BFC
DESCRIBING HOW ATTACK HAD BEEN MADE AND RESPONSIVE AC-

TIONS TAKEN BY GIRM MILITARY FORCES. HE NOTED THAT ATTACKING FORCE WAS AN "ARMY" CONSISTING OF OVER 100 VEHICLES AND THEIR SUPPORT EQUIPMENT LED BY ALGERIAN REGULAR ARMY OFFICER. HE DESCRIBED ZOUERATE AS BEING SURROUNDED BY BELT OF LANDMINES AND DEFENSIVE POSITIONS, EXCEPT FOR 4 TO 5 KILOMETER UNMINED STRIP NEAR THE RESIDENTIAL CIVILIAN SECTION OF TOWN. PART OF THE ATTACKING FORCE ENTERED THROUGH THIS UNMINED STRIP AND ATTACKED AIRPORT, NEARBY FOREIGNERS' SOCIAL CLUB AND CIVILIAN RESIDENTIAL AREAS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE ATTACK FORCE AVOIDED MILITARY TARGETS IN ORDER TO ATTACK CIVILIANS AND HE COMMENTED THAT THE ASSASSINATION OF A FRENCH DOCTOR AND HIS WIFE WAS AN ACT OF "BANDITRY". FOREIGN MINISTER STATED THAT LOCAL GENDARMES AND MILITARY FORCES RESPONDED TO ATTACK WITHIN 15 MINUTES AND THAT FOR THE FIRST DAY AFTER ATTACK THE ARMY HAD FOLLOWED THE RETREATING ENEMY FORCE, BUT UNDER ORDERS NOT TO ATTACK FOR SAKE OF HOSTAGES. FINALLY, A DAY OR SO LATER, THERE WAS A FIERCE BATTLE 150 KILOMETERS EAST OF ZOUERATE IN WHICH 50 MEMBERS OF THE ATTACK FORCE WERE KILLED AND 20 VEHICLES DESTROYED AFTER WHICH THE ENEMY FORCES SPLIT. FOREIGN MINISTER NOTED THAT THE FORCES WERE NOW ABOUT 170 KILOMETERS FURTHER EAST AND HE WAS AWAITING INFORMATION AS REGARDS SUBSEQUENT BATTLES.

3. FOREIGN MINISTER EMPHASIZED THAT THIS ATTACK WAS AN ACT OF TRUE AGGRESSION (VERITABLE AGRESSION). IT WAS AN EFFORT BY A LARGE COUNTRY TO IMPOSE ITS WILL ON A SMALL COUNTRY. IF A LARGE NATION CAN SUCCEED WITH SUCH

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USE OF FORCE, THEN "THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE" PREVAILS. MOUKNASS NOTED THAT ALGERIANS HAD ISOLATED THEMSELVES IN A POLITICAL SENSE--AS THE ONLY ARAB STATE JOINED BY FOUR RADICAL AFRICAN STATES (MOUKNASS SPECIFIED BENIN, GUINEA-BISSAU, ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE) TO RECOGNIZE THE SAHARAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC-- AND HAD TURNED TO FORCE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES. HE COMMENTED THAT THE ALGERIAN USE OF FORCE WAS REMINISCENT OF EFFORTS BY COLONIAL POWERS TO SUBJUGATE COLONIES. HE CONCLUDED BRIEFING BY REQUESTING THAT I PASS THE GIRM POSITION TO MY GOVERNMENT AND ASKED "WHAT COUNTRY CAN SAY THAT THIS (ATTACK) IS NOT AGGRESSION".

4. COMMENT: FOREIGN MINISTER'S BRIEFING WAS ONE OF A SERIES FOR AMBASSADORS AND CHARGES RESIDENT IN NOUAKCHOTT. MY VISIT WAS FOLLOWED BY ROMANIAN AMBASSADOR AND SPANISH AMBASSADOR HAD BEEN CONVOKED FOR ONE-HALF HOUR LATER.

BASIC POINTS COVERED BY FOREIGN MINISTER WERE OUTLINED IN MAY 9 ISSUE OF CHAAB, GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED DAILY,

WHICH GAVE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT MOKTAR OULD DADDAH, FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS AND EDITORIAL BY MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS BA MAMADOU ALASSANE. LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE, WHICH HAS EMPHASIZED THAT ZOUERATE ATTACK WAS AN ALGERIAN-SPONSORED ACT OF AGGRESSION, IS FIRST TIME SINCE JUNE 1976 NOUAKCHOTT RAID THAT GIRM HAS DECIDED TO USE LOCAL PRESS TO DESCRIBE MILITARY OPERATIONS. (PRESS COVERAGE BEING REPORTED SEPTEL). EUROPEAN PRESS WILL PROBABLY BE REPORTING MAURITANIAN STATEMENTS SOON SINCE PRESIDENT AND FOREIGN MINISTER GAVE INTERVIEWS TO GROUP OF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, INCLUDING REUTERS SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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